

July, 1918.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
BUREAU OF EDUCATION,  
WASHINGTON.

---

THE BUREAU OF EDUCATION AND THE EDUCATIONAL SURVEY MOVEMENT.<sup>1</sup>

---

By S. P. CAPEN,

Specialist in Higher Education, Bureau of Education.

---

The Bureau of Education has conducted or assisted in some 20 educational surveys. No other person or institution has made so many, I believe. Surveying is, indeed, coming to be one of the bureau's principal occupations. The reports of most of these investigations have been published or are on the way to be published. Any citizen of the United States may secure them on demand and may applaud or condemn them individually or in bulk. Several citizens have availed themselves of all these opportunities. Some of the things they have said have been true. I can admit so much without appearing in the rôle of either critic or defender.

You may be interested to know why the bureau has added educational surveying to its tasks. Although established primarily as an agency for recording by statistical means and otherwise the progress of American education, the bureau has come to have a considerable influence as the years have passed in shaping the policies and determining the standards of educational institutions. This influence is stronger in some sections of the country than in others. It has never been exercised in a coercive way in any section. It is wholly appropriate, however, that the National repository of information respecting educational matters should be called upon by school officers for constructive suggestion and advice. The present commissioner has believed from the beginning of his incumbency that the true function of his bureau is to render precisely this service, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Address before the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Middle States and Maryland, Dec. 1, 1917.

he has endeavored to develop its force and equipment with that end in view. He was quick to see the bearings of the survey movement. Probably no more effective method for assisting an institution or an educational system has yet been devised than a well-planned and carefully executed survey—I am not now claiming that all the bureau's surveys may be thus characterized. The cumulative effect on the educational standards of the country of the considerable number of surveys made by the same agency and embodying the same basic point of view is likely to be very great. The commissioner was convinced that the increasing demand for this kind of investigation presented his office with both an opportunity and responsibility. Accordingly, about three years ago he offered the services of the bureau in the prosecution of educational surveys, as far as its resources would permit. Since that time the requests for these services have been constant. The bureau has been able to meet but a fraction of them. Indeed, if its force of investigators were doubled and were relieved of all other duties, they would find full occupation in this field alone.

There is another reason why the bureau's officers have felt that the making of educational surveys is an appropriate part of their work. Surveys are ticklish things, seldom wholly pleasant to the persons who instigate them, still less to the persons whose activities are examined. There is generally a recoil. In the first heat of the reaction the surveyed are prone to reach for a weapon with which to wreak vengeance upon the surveyor. Two lie ready at hand. You may impugn the surveyor's motives or you may ridicule his capacity. Now, the Bureau of Education enjoys a certain immunity from both these methods of reprisal. It is a public instrument supported by the whole country. It represents no locality or special interest, and therefore can not possibly be partisan. Moreover, without claiming any peculiar talent for its officers, it is safe to say that they have a wider first-hand acquaintance with educational conditions throughout the country than almost any other group of persons, and behind them stands the accumulated information of half a century. These things do not guarantee the wisdom of any of the bureau's pronouncements, but they establish a presumption in favor of its honesty and its judgment, which has proved a very present help in time of trouble.

These are some of the reasons why the Bureau of Education has become one of the principal surveying agencies. In response to requests it has examined and reported on the State higher institutions of five States and two private higher institutions, the public-school systems of three States, the school systems of three cities, the rural schools of two counties, and the private schools for negroes in the United States. It has under way studies of several other

State systems. In the time at my disposal I could not, of course, give a detailed account of even a single one of these investigations. I should like, however, to present some other points of view.

We believe that a survey should be constructive. The word is easy to use and perhaps vague, but it may be illustrated by a few examples. For instance, the Bureau of Education tries to determine what particular purposes an institution or a group of institutions should serve. Are these purposes recognized by the responsible officials? Is there the right form of organization, adequate support, sufficient equipment, a proper teaching staff, efficient and economical management? If not, what steps consonant with past tradition and existing public sentiment may be taken to secure these things? The bureau has constantly refrained from mere faultfinding. It has never contented itself merely with recording what it sees. It tries to avoid unnecessary personalities also.

You will observe that the majority of its surveys have dealt with State systems, State higher institutions, or the public schools of a whole State. This has naturally led it to stress in its reports certain aspects of education which might demand less attention in a large city like Boston or St. Louis. It is no secret that the organization of public education in many States leaves much to be desired. The bureau has therefore especially emphasized questions of organization. It has steadfastly upheld principles of efficiency, organization, and control: appointive, nonpartisan, long-term boards; the removal of educational institutions from the baneful influence of politics; the location of power and responsibility in the hands of expert executive officers; the limitation of areas of supervision, etc. These are simple and self-evident postulates, perhaps, but experience shows that they come with a shock of novelty to many communities.

I am inclined to think that an equally important feature of practically all of our reports has been the treatment of the question of support for public education. Gradually the bureau has assembled a rather formidable mass of comparative data bearing on this matter. Since it has not thus far been our lot to survey the most liberal Commonwealth, it has been possible to bring the blush of shame to even the most hardened legislator's cheek by demonstrating the relative niggardliness of his State in its provisions for public institutions. But wholly aside from this stimulus to State rivalry, the bureau has tried to show that education is an investment and that the more a community lays out the more it may expect to get back. To judge by the immediacy of the response in almost every case, this probably represents the most valuable contribution to the cause of education which has come from the bureau's surveying activities.



The bureau's surveys have endeavored to take into account the social and economic setting of the institutions studied. A school or a university does not float in a vacuum. It is conditioned by the community which it serves. As communities differ, so do, or should, schools differ. Their courses of study are, or should be, adjusted to the physical environment, the character of the population, the industries, and the professions of the community. This is, of course, particularly true of the higher institutions. It is true in part of the lower schools also. Strangely enough, the residents of a section are more likely to overlook these important factors in the determination of educational policies than outsiders. The Bureau of Education has attempted to bring them home to the consciousness of the educational officials at least. The most radical readjustments it has suggested in its recent reports have been based upon studies of the topography, the resources, population, and the occupations of the several States.

It frequently happens that the principal motive for a State-wide survey or a survey of several more or less competing State higher institutions is the desire to settle a controversy. For example, there is a typical and perennial controversy in nearly every one of the 19 States which maintain colleges of agriculture and mechanic arts separate from the State university. In many of these States the agricultural college has of late become a technical university. The university, on the other hand, if it has followed the trend of modern education and responded to the demand for practical training of professional grade, has tended also to become a technical university. Shall there be two? How much of the State appropriations for higher education shall each institution receive? What portion of the field of higher education shall each institution cover? In the attempt to find an answer to these questions war bands of loyal alumni harry the State, politicians bleed and die, presidents are led helplessly to the guillotine, education is outraged and despised of men. Indeed, the harmonious and economical adjustment of these two types of institutions to the performance of the State's educational task, the establishment of definite and equitable relations between them, constitute possibly the greatest problem in educational administration in the United States. In the present irritated condition of public sentiment in these afflicted areas, I think it safe to say that the problem could not possibly be solved by insiders.

The Bureau of Education has been elected arbiter of the dispute in four States. In my own opinion the most striking and novel of its contributions to the literature of surveying are its pronouncements on the interrelations of these land-grant colleges and the separate State universities. The bureau has emphasized the State's point of view. No institution lives for itself alone. No upright or patriotic institutional official can seek the aggrandizement of his institution at

the expense of the State's interests. The service of the State is the touchstone by which every educational policy must be tested. This is not unheard-of doctrine, yet in many States it appears to have been forgotten. The bureau's novel contribution, however, is the principle it has proposed for adjusting the work between two overlapping State-supported higher institutions. This is the principle of major and service lines. As it has been much commented upon in the public press, I should like to say a word about it.

The principle is based on the assumption that the duplication by two or more State-supported institutions of the fundamental collegiate courses is necessary, desirable, and not uneconomical. Duplication of expensive professional training, however, is, except in the richest and most populous States, an unwarranted and perverse extravagance. Now, the subtle development of this type of duplication may be avoided if the State authorities will apply to the institutions the principle of major and service lines.

In accordance with this principle each institution should have assigned to it certain major fields which it should develop as fully as may be practicable. Literature, history, philosophy, medicine, at the university are such major lines; at the agricultural college, agriculture and home economics.

Service lines are such subordinate subjects as are essential to the proper cultivation of a major line. The amount required in these lines varies, but is generally not very full or comprehensive. Being usually directed toward a special purpose, the modern languages are service lines at the agricultural college; home economics at the university. Institutions may well overlap as regards the relation of their service lines to one another, and more particularly as regards the relation of their major to their service lines. English is a major line at the university, a service line at the agricultural college. There should be no material overlapping of major lines.

All critics of surveys and most surveyors note the scarcity of devices for measuring either administration or teaching and the inadequacy of those that exist. I suppose nearly every surveyor has tried to invent some new unit of measurement or has attempted some new application of units already elsewhere employed. The bureau has done both these things. Its experiences here have been both astounding and salutary. Persons who could find no particular fault with the broader and more constructive aspects of its reports have attacked these details. Their relative importance has been magnified. Moreover, the opinion has been repeatedly expressed that having proposed certain standards and having suggested certain tentative methods of estimating various phases of academic procedure the bureau stands committed to the defense of these devices, however defective later investigations may prove them to be. This is absurd,

and the absurdity is apparent to anyone who will take the trouble to review the bureau's reports chronologically. From such a review it will appear that we have constantly refined and improved our units of measurement. If any one of them has been shown to be mistaken or misleading, it has not been used again. The bureau recognizes that surveys are still in the experimental stage. It does the best it can with the means available. As soon as better means are developed it adopts them and discards the old. Our position is, moreover, that every survey stands on its own bottom. It proves its own case or it is a failure. A few of the standards and units which have been proposed in the bureau's surveys seem to have commended themselves to institutional officers and to other investigators. As time goes on they appear to be increasingly useful in our own studies also. I am disposed to believe that these may be counted among the bureau's definite contributions to the technique of educational engineering.

Probably the supreme gift of the surveyor is the gift of prophetic vision. If he can see farther and more clearly than those who labor with the machinery of teaching and administering, and if he can persuade them to believe in his vision and to follow it, then he has indeed been constructive. This is the determining characteristic of a really fruitful survey. Whether any of our work meets this final test or not I can not say. I know, however, that it has been the bureau's earnest effort to look beyond the immediate future to foresee the development of both a community and its institutions and to suggest policies which may be helpful for many years to come. Time alone will tell whether its forecasts have been correct.